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Black History Issue

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A TRIBUTE TO VERNON DAHMER, SR.

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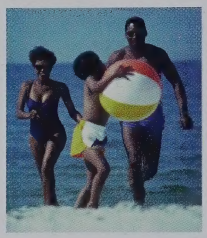

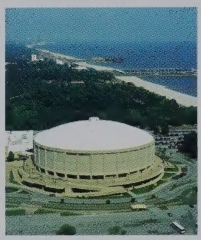

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Harrison County Board of Supervisors, left to right: Standing: John McAdams, Chancery Clerk; Larry Benefield, President, District 2; Robin Alfred Midcalf, Esq., District 4; Joseph R. Meadows, Board Attorney; Seated: C. T. Switzer, Jr., Vice President, District 5; Bobby Eleuterius, District 1; David V. LaRosa, Sr. District 3.

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MISSISSIPPI Star

VOL.2 NO. 6 FEBRUARY 1998

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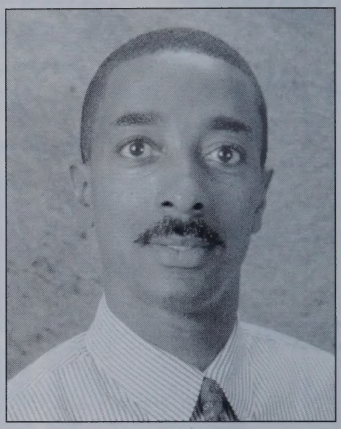


Maurice E. Singleton, Jr.

Let me begin by saying that I am honored to have Vernon Dahmer, Sr.'s image on the cover of the Black History Issue of Mississippi Star and that we are paying tribute to this man. Vernon Dahmer, Sr. is a heroic person who believed in America - free enterprise, hard work, the value of family and helping his fellow man in any way he could.

His death resulted from injuries he sustained as he attempted to hold off two carloads of klansmen who firebombed his home and business in the middle of the night in order that his family could escape safely from the burning house and store. Vernon Dahmer is a real American hero!

That cold January night in 1966 was recalled vividly by Mrs. Ellie Jewel Davis Dahmer, his widow, as if it happened yesterday. Thirty-two years may seem like a long time, but let me assure you, after talking with Mrs. Dahmer, the pain caused by that cowardly act persists.

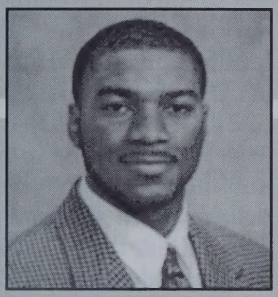
I didn't know Vernon Dahmer, Sr., but I did get to know his two youngest children a little - Bettie and Dennis - while we were students at the University of Southern Mississippi during the 70's. I say, a little, because I learned a great deal more about them in the two hours I spoke with their mother recently. A mother's perspective is comprehensive.

Recently, I met another of Dahmer's children, Vernon Dahmer, Jr. who has been the family spokesperson. Vernon Jr. is encouraged by the ongoing investigation and the possibility of justice prevailing. He is optimistic in what he calls "a new day" in Mississippi.

I must admit, it is an extremely encouraging thought and feeling to hear a Black man in Mississippi say that he is encouraged by the times and the court system. I am certain that we all feel that Mississippi has changed dramatically for the better over the past thirty years, and I certainly do. But to hear that from a member of a family who has endured so much, first as victims of such a vigilantic act and secondly as victims of a judicial system that had sufficient evidence to do much more than it did, that is indeed an encouraging message.

Thanks to Mrs. Ellie Jewel Davis Dahmer and Vernon Dahmer, Jr. and the entire Dahmer family for recalling the painful memories of this horrendous act and sharing your story. MS

We Put People First On And Off The Field



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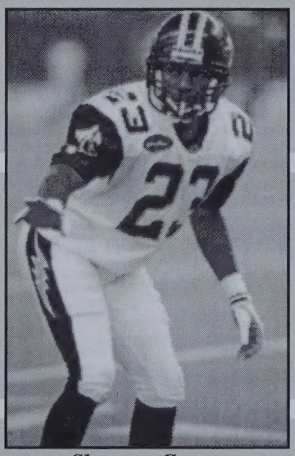
Six months out of the year Shannon Garrett is a loan officer at our Gulfport Branch. The other six months he is a defensive back for the Winnipeg Blue Bombers.

At the Peoples Bank, we have been putting people first for 100 years. In Shannon's case that means holding his job for him while he plays football in Canada each year.

The next time you're in our Gulfport Branch, be sure to say hi to Shannon and wish him luck in the upcoming season!



Shannon Garrett
Defensive Back
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LETTERS

Dear Maurice,

Even though I am not a frequent letter writer, I felt compelled to respond after reading the January '98 issue of the *Mississippi Star*. It was so full of interesting and useful information. The advice from qualified area professionals on saving, investing, insurance, and health care was all very valuable stuff. Your readers were treated to much more information than one would expect to find at such a bargain price. And we would all do well to heed any of the advice that would help to otherwise improve our respective lifestyles and/or situations.

It is my humble opinion that you went the extra yard - above and beyond the call of duty to not only inform the readership, but also to eloquently urge us to take control of our lives, rather than merely accepting whatever comes along.

As a tennis coach and an avid tennis player, physical fitness is a big part of my life. I understand the importance of it, and I commend you, in your Publisher's Page, for conveying the importance of both physical and spiritual fitness. Both are essential.

Finally, congratulations on the progress of the *Mississippi Star* to this point. As you obviously strive for excellence your magazine continues to improve. Continued Success!!

Sincerely,

Myron Labat, Sr.
Bay St. Louis, MS

Dear Mr. Singleton,

Hi! My name is Deven Daniels. I am an eleventh grade honor student at Pass Christian High School, and I also serve on the Student Council (also known as the Student Government).

Today I received my December issue of *Mississippi Star*. I really enjoy reading this magazine, because it is a very positive image for people of all ages in our state and in the different communities of our state. I wish it was some way that I could get other students that attend my school to become more involved in reading your magazine. We receive a monthly copy at our school library, but you know how teenagers are.

I just wanted to let you know how grateful I am to be receiving my own copy of the *Mississippi Star.*

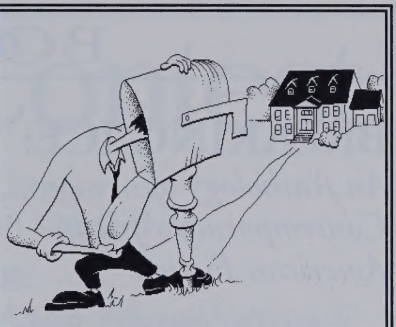
Sincerely,

Deven Daniels
Pass Christian, MS

Tell Us What You Think About

MISSISSIPPI *Star*

Express your point of view in a letter.



MOVING? RECENTLY MOVED? ABOUT TO MOVE?

Please Drop Us A Line With Your New Address So You Can Be Sure To Receive Your ***Mississippi Star!***

Letters to the Publisher

should be 100 words or less.

Star Calendar: Events of interest to South Mississippians should be submitted on your organization's letterhead, specifying the date, time, place of event and a number of contact. Submissions should be received by the twentieth day of the preceding month.

Be sure to include a daytime telephone number.

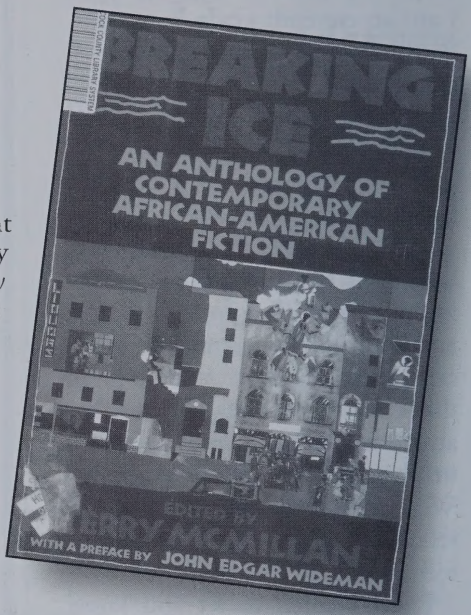
Mail submissions to

Mississippi Star, P.O. Box 2651, Bay St. Louis, MS 39521.

Mississippi Star reserves the right to refuse or decline to publish any submission.

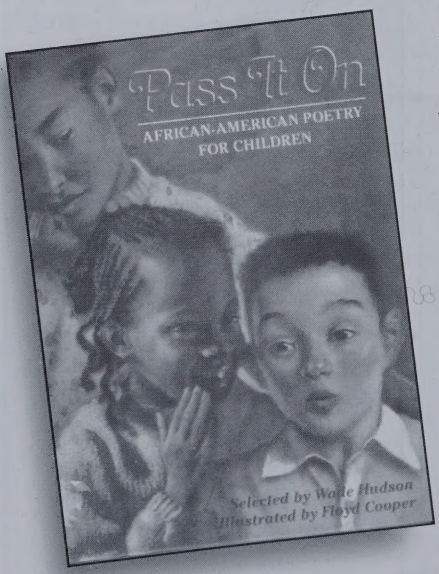
BOOKS

BREAKING ICE:
An Anthology of Contemporary African-American Fiction



Terry McMillan has brought together the works of nearly sixty writers in *Breaking Ice: An Anthology of Contemporary African-American Fiction,* (Published by Viking Penquin, 1990). Ernest Gaines, Alice Walker, Amiri Baraka and Ntozake Shange are some of the familiar writers whose works are included. Brief personal histories of the writers are included.

If you enjoy reading short stories, *Breaking Ice* offers a broad variety of styles and life experiences in this compilation of the works of new and established authors.



PASS IT ON:
African-American Poetry For Children

Pass It On: African-American Poetry For Children (Published by Scholastic, Inc. 1993) is a collection of poems selected by Wade Hudson, illustrated by Floyd Cooper. *Pass It On* provides children with powerful poetic messages of pride, history and enjoying life. *Dream Variation* by Langston Hughes is one of the favorites along with Nikki Giovanni's *The Reason I Like Chocolate.* Other contributors include Gwendolyn Brooks and Paul Lawrence Dunbar.

Essay Contest

Competition Categories:
7th-9th Grades, 10th-12th Grades

Theme:

Why I Am Proud of My Generation and of What We Can Accomplish

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$50 Savings Bond - 2nd Place

First Place Essays will be published in March Issue of *Mississippi Star*

Contest Rules:

Essays should be 250 - 300 words in length and must be typed (double-spaced). All entries must be received by February 15, 1998 at the following address.

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Local African Americans Remembered

by Clementine Williams

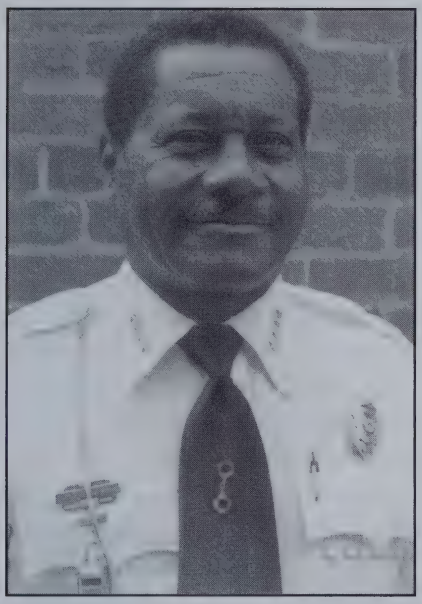
Note: In the 60's and 70's black was the word used to identify our proud heritage. As we moved into the 80's and 90's African American became the term of the times. The two terms Black History and African American History, referenced in this article will be used synonymously to identify the outstanding contributions of our proud race.

As we celebrate what has become known as Black History Month we must reflect on the black history of our own state and communities.

In most of our public schools today the history of our African American race is a child's essay on the life of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. or posters on a classroom bulletin board of a few renowned pioneers such as Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass and Carter G. Woodson. The history book in our public schools have failed to recognize the outstanding significance the black race has played in forming and shaping our country.

To rectify some of the injustices, "Black History Month" became a vital part of our country's conscienceness. It became alright to celebrate black history one month out of the year. It was alright to let all children know that the African American race has a long history of proud achievements one month out of the year. It became alright to disseminate factual studies which would put the black race in true perspective in American history one month out of the year.

We must take note of the fact that as we celebrate African American history



Douglas J. Williams became first Black Chief of Police in Bay St. Louis in 1976.

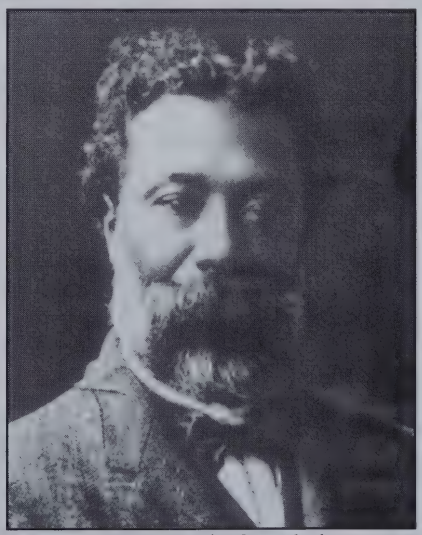
we are truly celebrating American history and the history must be celebrated twelve months of the year.

However, as the nation celebrates Black History Month we must also celebrate and respect the roles of our own state and community pioneers. The works and courage of people like Medgar Evers, Aaron Henry, Fannie Lou Hammer, Vernon Dahmer, Dr. Gilbert Mason and many others in our state helped shape a course in history that shall never be reversed. They led the way to a better life for all of God's children.

We must also remember those ordinary citizens in our very own community. People like Louis Piernas who was the first and only black postmaster in Bay St. Louis. People like Douglas J. Williams, my daddy and my most beloved and respected role model, and William Tate, II who became the first black policeman in white majority Bay St. Louis in 1965.

They worked dutifully and untiringly during the height of the civil rights turmoil taking abuses and injustices from the entire community. These two men, with love and support from family and friends, withstood the storm and helped provide a life of positive change and opportunity for all citizens.

My dad, Douglas Williams, later (in 1976) became the first black Chief of Police. He withstood early negativeness and became a respected leader throughout his community and state. People like Albert J. Fairconnetue: This man, along with our former city councilman Thomas Farve, was instrumental in chartering the Hancock County Chapter of the NAACP in the early seventies. These men, with a few friends, walked the streets, knocking on doors



Louis Piernas was the first Black man to serve as postmater in Bay St. Louis.

and entering taverns to get the memberships needed. They knew that a local NAACP chapter was a necessity in our community to advance the causes of our African American citizenry.

People like Joseph Labat, Sr., father of Celestine and Veronica Labat, who was a self-made building contractor in the 20's and 30's: This man built St. Rose de Lima Church, Valena C. Jones Methodist Church and many other buildings including several homes on the Bay St. Louis beachfront.

People like Richmond Barthe', brother of Louise Williams and Louis J. Franklin of Bay St. Louis, who as a poor but determined young man became one of the world's greatest sculptors, with works exhibited in museums of Paris, New York, Birmingham and Tulane University.

People like Geraldine Lang, an ordinary lady, who has played and continues to play a vital role in helping the poor and downtrodden of our community: This is a lady committed to making life better and creating greater opportunities for all African Americans.

These aforementioned citizens and many more like them made major sacrifices so that we could enjoy the full benefits and opportunities that have always been made available to others.

We must make known to our children and grandchildren the outstanding contributions of these and other community, state and national heroes. This history is not to be celebrated for only one week, nor just one month, but it must be celebrated every day of the year, if not nationally, then in our homes, schools and churches. MS

Clementine Williams is the principal of Delisle Elementary School. She is a graduate of Alcorn State University; holds a master's degree from Tennessee State University and a Specialists Degree in Elementary Education/School Administration from the University of Southern Mississippi Gulf Park Campus. Clementine is an active member of St. Rose de Lima Catholic Church. She is also a member of the Hancock County Branch of the NAACP.

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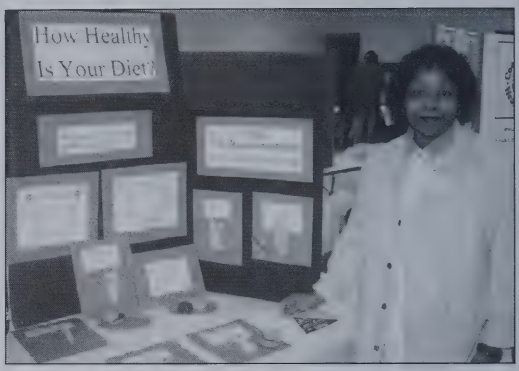

Getting A Healthy Start: **Evelynn Stephens,** school nurse is standing in front of one of the many displays at Moss Point School District's first Health Fair. Stephens and Stephanie Lee, the district's new nurses, coordinated the fair offering more than 300 employees the opportunity to receive blood pressure and cholesterol screenings. Free vision screenings and information on various medical and environmental issues were also available. More than 30 of the coast's local health organizations, hospitals, doctors and environmentalists were on hand to offer their support.

Rust College President **David L. Beckley** (left) accepts award from **Dr. John M. Templeton, Jr.,** president of the John Templeton Foundation which recently announced its 1997-98 Honor Roll for Character-Building Colleges. Rust College was one of 134 recognized.

"One of the primary goals of education is the development of moral character - those habits of heart, mind and spirit that help students know, love and do what is good," said Templeton. "Because of Rust's demonstrated efforts to develop moral character in its students, the John Templeton Foundation is pleased to name Rust College to our Honor Roll for Character-Building Colleges."

Newly elected officers of Mississippi Coast Association of Black Journalists recently celebrated the holidays with their December meeting at a Coast restaurant. From left, Maurice Singleton, secretary; Tiffany Zeno, 1st vice president; Miyoka Broussard, 2nd vice president; Danielle Jewett, treasurer; Vivian Austin, Financial Secretary; and Rip Daniels, president.

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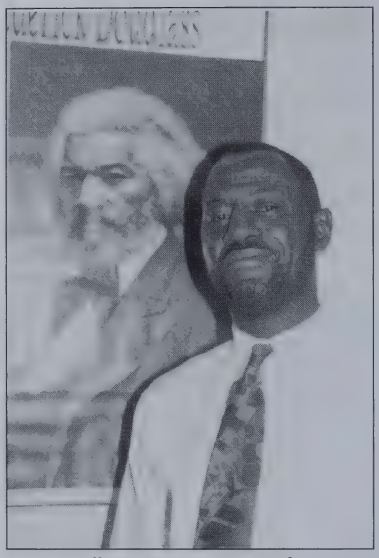
African Americans That Influenced Me and Helped to Shape My Life

by Attorney William W. Martin

The decisions that I have made in the past have been influenced by numerous people, some that have been very close to me and others that I have only ready about. However, regardless of whether I have known the people personally or not, I still believe that my knowledge of them, and the knowledge that I have gained from them has had a very positive influence on my life.



William W. Martin stands in front of the image of his greatest idol, Frederick Douglass.

Of course, my closest and most personal role model has always been my father, who, unfortunately, passed away without getting the opportunity to see me finish college or law school. Although he never attended college himself, he always stressed education as the only true means of escaping a life of poverty. His community involvement and positive outlook on life always made me believe that I could accomplish any goal that I set for myself.

Nationally, I have always admired Thurgood Marshall, for his role in fighting racism and discrimination in the Courts and later becoming the first African-American U.S. Supreme Court Justice. His actions influenced me into becoming a lawyer, because I saw how a few individuals with law degrees and conviction could help to change the lives of the masses and reshape the nation. Here in the State of Mississippi, another idol of mine is also a Judge. He is the Honorable Fred Banks, Mississippi Supreme Court Justice. However, I first met Judge Banks long before he became a Judge. I had the opportunity to hear him speak on many occasions while attending college and later, he represented me *pro bono* (for free) when the Mississippi Bar Association questioned my admission to the Bar. Even today, he remains an active participant on the National Board of the NAACP while many of our so-called leaders have forgotten from whence they came.

However, my greatest idol is Frederick Douglass. Although I have

only read about him or seen movies depicting him, I consider him, without a doubt one of the greatest Americans to ever set foot on American soil. Of course, Frederick Douglass lived in the 1800's. Although he was born a slave, after obtaining his freedom, he educated himself and began fighting for the end of slavery. He is considered as one of the greatest abolitionists in our history. I admire him mostly because he took a stand against slavery and discrimination during a time period when Black men were being killed for voicing the opinion that slavery was wrong. Although born a slave, he met and dined with Presidents and other national and international dignitaries and helped influence President Lincoln to end slavery in this country. His accomplishments during the time period in which he lived are still mindboggling to me. MS

William W. Martin is a 41 year old practicing attorney with the firm of Conway & Martin, 1600 24th Ave, Gulfport,, MS 39502. He was the first African American Assistant Public Defender of Jackson County, MS and the first African American Assistant District Attorney for Harrison, Hancock and Stone Counties. He presently serves as president of the Gulfport Branch of the NAACP and president of the Gulfport Chapter of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. He is married and the father of three children.

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Keynote Speaker Laretta Marks

Lonnie Bradley presents Fr. A. Francis Theriault, Marin Luther King Jr. Award recipient with commemorative plaque.

Members of Goodwill Missionary Baptist Church Drill Team of Pass Christian praise God through reciting of Biblical verses and precision moves.

County Branch
per Theater Highlights

1998 Mother of the Year
Ophelia Raboteau

Ophelia Raboteau being crowned by 1997 Mother of the Year, Mrs. Pat Tice.

More Mother of the Year Supper Theater Highlights

Philip Williams pays tribute to 1998 Mother of the Year with a soulful rendition of *You Are So Beautiful..*

Candidate Ophelia Raboteau escorted by her son, Tony Raboteau.

Candidate Phyllis Antoine escorted by her husband, Emanuel Antoine, Sr.

Tory Acker, representing candidtae Shirley Thompson, is escorted by Ronnie Cosby.

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Vernon Dahmer, Sr.
A Man Remembered, A Tragedy Recalled

by Maurice E. Singleton, Jr.

The smile of Vernon Dahmer Sr. as he sits atop his tractor captures the essence of the man who had a knack for balancing hard work and recreation. During the summer, after a day of hard work, he would take his children for a swim. An avid sportsman, he enjoyed baseball, hunting and fishing.

Vernon Dahmer, Sr. loved people and he would do anything to help anyone. He was a brave man who encouraged people to vote, showed them how to vote and even drove some people to the polls and provided them with emotional support during the 1950's and 1960's when Black Americans were threatened and intimidated for attempting to exercise their rights as American citizens. He was also a successful farmer and businessman who provided a good living for his family. Because of these things, Dahmer was viewed as a threat to the status quo and a target to hate groups such as the Ku Klux Klan.

Between 1:30 and 2:00 a.m. on January 10, 1966 the Dahmer family home in the Kelly Settlement community just northeast of Hattiesburg was firebombed by two carloads of night-riding klansmen who had been ordered to destroy the house and the small grocery store that the Dahmer family owned. The klansmen succeeded.

Vernon Dahmer Sr. and his daughter Bettie who was ten years of age at the time were injured and hospitalized. That afternoon at approximately 2:00 p.m. Vernon Dahmer, Sr. died at Forrest

General Hospital in Hattiesburg.

Eighteen white males were indicted on various state and/or federal charges ranging from murder and arson to conspiracy and intimidation in connection with the January 10, 1966 assault on the Dahmer family. Four were convicted and served time, three of whom were sentenced to life. Not any of them served more than ten years in prison. One turned State's evidence and walked away.

Several of the descendants of Vernon Dahmer, Sr. presently reside in close proximity to the site of the tragic bombing near his widow, Mrs. Ellie Jewel Dahmer, who resides in a home built in the exact same spot. Although this tragic event occurred just over thirty-two years ago, it is very difficult for the family to discuss some of the details.

Mrs. Dahmer and Vernon Dahmer, Jr. spoke with me recently about the events of January 10, 1966, the spirit and bravery of Vernon Sr., their optimism in a favorable outcome to the current investigation and on forgiving the perpetrators.

•••••••

"We had no idea that two carloads would come out here," Mrs. Ellie Dahmer, widow of the civil rights leader began to recall the event that took the life of her husband thirty-two years ago, still puzzled by the magnitude of the attack. "Does it take that many men to destroy a family?"

"Here is another thing, too, the public is not aware of, I don't think," Vernon Dahmer, Jr. added. "That night when the klansmen came to this yard - two carloads of them - one carload stopped at the store to destroy it, and another came down here to destroy the house. They didn't come here to kill my father. They came here to kill the entire family, consisting of six people. Because they could have killed my dad anytime they wanted to. He was on the tractor in the field, on the road in his truck; he didn't restrict his movement.

A retired school teacher, Mrs. Ellie Jewel Dahmer recalls the painful events of January 10, 1966 as she scans through family files.

"They wanted to send a message to all the negroes in the state of Mississippi by wiping out a whole family."

The evidence substantiates Vernon Jr.'s beliefs. Four klansmen were in each vehicle.

Mrs. Dahmer said that the members of the family had been prepared to protect themselves and to defend themselves in the event of an attack. And with a steady stream of telephone threats, they prepared to protect themselves as best they could by staggering sleep schedules, being careful not to stand in front of the windows in the living room and keeping loaded guns in places that allowed for quick access.

"He knew if one or two would come out here that he could take care of them," she said.

"We wouldn't be here to tell the story today if he hadn't been shooting back, so that we could get out. He kept all guns loaded. Everywhere he went there was a gun.

Vernon Dahmer Jr. points out that the area in the rear of where the family's store had been was the apartment his father had built for his aunt Luranie Heidelberg, who was 80 years old at the time of the bombing. She managed to escape unharmed.

"Now even though Vernon was on the tractor, on the cottonpicker, he always carried a gun. He had a shotgun on that tractor with him. He had a shotgun with him on that cottonpicker. And most of the time he had a handgun in that toolbox.

"All of his sons were good marksmen," she explained. "Even Dennis was a good marksman. He would take Dennis with groups going squirrel hunting. He had to stop Dennis from killing squirrels so the other people could shoot some. Dennis was a marksman before he was twelve years old."

Mrs. Dahmer also explained that Dennis was already a good driver at age eleven. Although he was too young to get a driver's license, he was prepared to take his father to the hospital in the event he was injured during an attack.

"Bettie had also been driving for some time when Vernon was killed," she said. "All of my children started driving young. And they all knew that if something happened, if Vernon was attacked, they were to get him to the hospital. We told them to run red lights if they had to. But they knew to get him to the hospital if he was attacked."

Vernon Jr. explained that his father was a "real sportsman" who would like to hunt and fish everyday if he could. Living out in a rural area and spending a great deal of time with their father, the sons naturally idolized their father and became interested in hunting.

Vernon Dahmer's appreciation of sports and the outdoors earned him the respect of a man amongst men, but it also made him a more significant threat to lesser men - those who would choose to cowardly attack him and his family by breaking out the windows in the store and making anonymous threatening telephone calls.

'Nigger you're going to get killed.' 'Nigger you want to be white.' "These are some of the threats we got over the telephone about once a week, sometimes two times, whenever they felt like calling to harass us," she explained. "One thing I give them credit for: They never really said anything to Bettie and Dennis (ages

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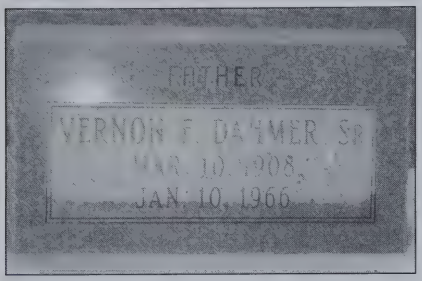
10 and 11 when their father was murdered). And they really didn't say anything to me, but I would listen in on calls



A headstone marks the grave of Vernon Dahmer Sr. behind Shady Grove Baptist Church in the Kelly Settlement Community.

when they called him to the phone. They'd ask to speak to him. Then I'd listen in on the call.

"For years we slept in shifts," Mrs. Dahmer, a retired school teacher recalled. "I slept the first part of the night and he slept the second part. I'd go to bed as soon as I could get in the bed, especially during school time. I'd get in the bed around 6 (p.m.) and I'd get up at around twelve thirty or one, and wash and iron and cook the meal for the next day. Then he would sleep until it was time to get up. And we did this for years...about five or six years."

Dahmer was involved in registering blacks to vote. His small grocery store had been selected by blacks to be the place where they would pay their poll taxes. The weekend prior to being murdered he had been collecting poll taxes which was a requirement for blacks who chose to vote.

"He was concerned about the community," said Mrs. Dahmer. "He had been told by people that if he would just shut his mouth they would let him vote. But that didn't mean that other black people could vote. He was concerned about getting other people registered to vote.

"To tell you the truth, black people were afraid to go down to vote. And the ones he convinced to go down there to register to vote, he would go with them. He would drive them down there and drive them back and stand there with them while they took the test, as moral support."

The idea of empowering blacks with the right to exercise their vote was a scary thought to some whites in the South in the late 1950's and early 1960's. And if a black person could make a decent living, he was regarded as "trying to be white" to some whites and a reflection of failure to some others who had not reached that level of success.

"The biggest threat was that he was a successful businessman," Mrs. Dahmer believes. "At the time of his death he owned a small grocery store, a sawmill and he did commercial cotton farming for a living. He had just finished picking and gathering in some of the cotton from the seventy-one acres he had planted.

"That was a lot of cotton for a person down here in the hills. That wouldn't have been nothing in the Delta. But that was quite a bit of cotton down here. And he was successful with the cotton crop. We had a very comfortable living with him...with the farming."

January 10, 1966

"We've been hit," Mrs. Dahmer remembers her husband saying as they awakened to the sounds of gunfire, glass shattering and fire sizzling the gases used to make the bombs and the materials it quickly consumed.

Mrs. Dahmer attempted to get Bettie out of a rear window of the house, but that window was jammed. As she attempted to force the window open, she fell through the window. Mr. Dahmer eventually passed Bettie through the window to Mrs. Dahmer. At that point Mrs. Dahmer began to feel the pains of her daughter who had been burned badly on her arms and forehead.

Dennis was able to get out and he went back into the house to awaken his brother Harold, and the two of them climbed out the back window. Harold backed the truck out of the carport despite a warning from his father that it might explode at any moment.

"Lord have mercy. Aunt Rainey's in that store burning up." Mrs. Dahmer yelled as she looked toward the store overcome with flames. Luranie Heidelberg, who was 80 years old at the time had escaped unharmed and was standing at the edge of the woods.

The six of them - all in their bed clothes - were driven to the hospital by neighbors. Mr. Dahmer and Bettie were admitted and placed in the same room.

"When the doctor came around, Vernon told them to see about Bettie. We thought we were going to lose Bettie."

That gesture along with Mr. Dahmer's assurances to Mrs. Dahmer that "everything was going to be all right" may have disguised the severity of his condition.

Later that morning Mrs. Dahmer went to a local store to purchase clothing and shoes for the family who had nothing but what they had on. She went back to Kelly Settlement, rested

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for a while and then returned to the hospital at the urging of family members.

At approximately two o'clock as Bettie had fallen asleep, Mrs. Dahmer - sitting between the two beds - moved her chair so that she could see her husband's face. She recalls that he was asleep. A few moments later, "He raised up quickly, calling 'Jewel.'

"I believe he was gone then," she said.

"I never knew he was that far gone," she recalled. "I didn't know that he was that sick. Others did, but I didn't. I guess you see what you want to see."

On the Ongoing Investigation and the Pursuit of Justice

"You don't walk away...from this," explained Vernon Dahmer, Jr.. "It's a lot of work I retired four years ago...It's a lot of work. I'd like to be fishing. There's a lot of things that I'd rather be doing than this because it's frustrating, and it drains you. You have to go through this. But I say, if this is what it takes to get us some relief; if we can live through this, it's well worth it.

"Not only that: when I look at what my father went through, and what other people went through, to try to get the things we enjoy today. And he didn't do it alone. There were many other people out there who put their lives on the lines just like he did. But he was our father and I look at what he went through: he was part of the NAACP back when I was just a young teenager in the 40's. He would come home and talk about Walter White (legendary NAACP figure), because he was a guy who did not keep important things from his family.

"He would always say, 'I want to be your brother, but I am still your father.' In other words, 'I am the man in charge,' but he always kept us all informed. And when it came news time, we all sat and listened to the news. So we grew up with an attention to what was going on around us. And when I look at how long he worked toward making things better, trying to get the opportunities, the chances he took back in the forties with other black folks. For me to go out and do what I'm doing is just a drop in the bucket. It's just a drop in the bucket. And if we can't do this as a family? If I can't do this as an individual, then I am not worthy to be his son. It's just that simple."

"You don't fear dying anymore," Mrs. Dahmer injected.

"Oh no," Vernon Jr. explained. "I had a reporter ask me: 'Well, do you ever fear for your life?' I said, if I did, I wouldn't be doing this. No! No!"

On Forgiving the murderers of Vernon Dahmer, Sr.

"I am praying for that strength," Mrs. Dahmer admits. "I teach Sunday School and I understand that forgiveness is one of the things to enter the kingdom. And they are praying for me."

"I think that if we ever get to the point," Vernon Jr. explained, "and look like that's going to hopefully happen. And we are optimistic about those who were involved in the murder and gave the orders to firebomb the house and kill my father.

"I think once we can see a completion of this in the right kind of way, in other words get them back in the courtroom, before the jury, and produce the evidence and let the jury make the decision.

"This time I have more faith in the jury setup than I did back then. Because we are experiencing a different climate

in Mississippi and throughout America now. These hate crimes should not go unpunished. And I think once we can

Mrs. Ellie Jewel Dahmer stands with Vernon Dahmer, Jr. in front of the house that was built on the same site of the one destroyed on January 10, 1966.

see this properly carried out, then that would put us in a position where we can put this behind us and the forgiveness piece would be a lot easier. To me justice is a part of that process to reach forgiveness. To have somebody...just cold blooded murder.

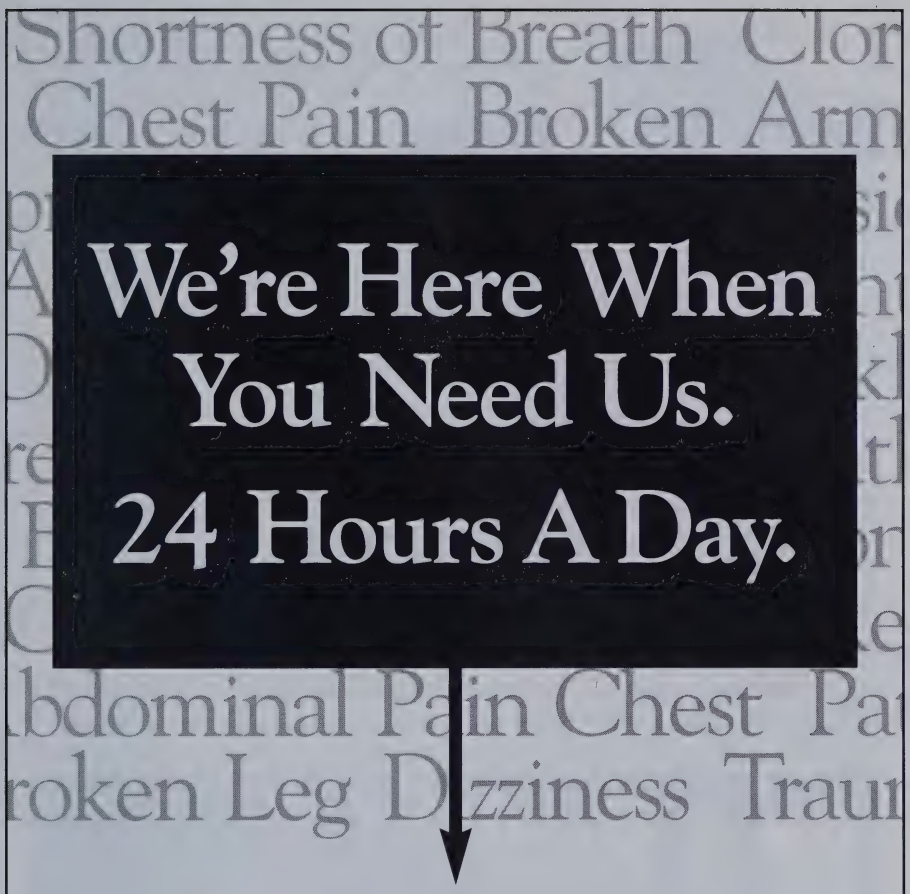
"There was so much hatred in these people that they wanted to send a message to the rest of the negroes in the state of Mississippi: 'Let's wipe out a whole family.' And they came for that specific purpose. And when you look at the magnitude of that kind of hatefulness or anger towards people just because they are of another color. And we are American citizens, law-abiding citizens. That makes it very, very, very difficult to lay down at night and sleep with.

"But hopefully, the way things are going now, we can reach that point. We are satisfied with the way the district attorney and the state attorney general and those that are working with them are doing their work. The case is moving forward. When I say moving forward, aggressively moving forward. There are no dead spots. It's moving forward and there's a real good feeling around what's going on. This feeling we have today is genuine."

"I think young America has done the most toward changing opinions about the Black race. Young whites and young blacks seeing things as they are," Mrs. Dahmer explained. "If it's wrong now, they knew it was wrong back then. I have heard children ask the parents, especially when we do interviews about the civil rights movement...One little white girl asked her mother, 'Mama, why didn't y'all help them?'

"The children are changing the parents. The younger generation is really calling their attention to it: 'If you're going to be a true Christian here, you need to be one everywhere. How can you teach to me to go to church, praise God, and love everybody and not do anything about what happened in 1966? I believe the young white children are really bringing America's attention to these facts."

Just before this story went to press, one of the key figures in previous investigations and subsequent trials turned himself in to state officials on Monday, February 10. Billy Roy Pitts, 54, had been convicted in the 1966 murder of Vernon Dahmer but never served time in prison.



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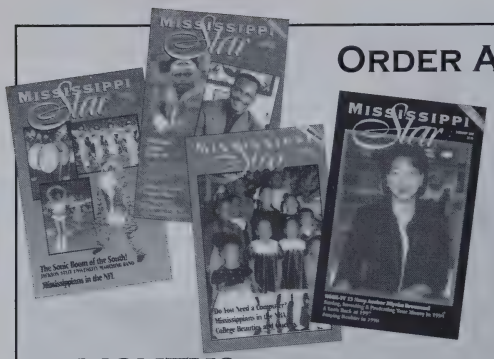

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GUEST WORD

SHAKE THE SHACKLES

by Hortense Enid Agee

Have you ever observed your neighbor, friend, coworker/colleague or relative achieve a goal and you just turned green with envy? Did it trouble you that you just could not be happy for them? Did you feel like you were in a vice being smothered by unconscious feelings/emotions?

Do you cheer on a team or player simply because of their skin color? Do you feel it is acceptable for you and/or Hollywood to use the "N" word? Is it acceptable for the "N" word to be used in your presence, but you don't say it?

If you or someone you know can answer yes to one or more of these questions, then it is apparent you or they are in Shackles. These shackles do apply to all races. The shackles I am referring to is a state of mind that impedes personal, emotional, intellectual and spiritual growth.

How can these vices/shackles be released? The first step is admitting that you are shackled. However, if you are not the culprit, but a bystander, don't participate in their negative behavior and/or conversation.

Be aware that most habits are difficult to change, but with continued perseverance we can all succeed.

"Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His Might," (Ephesians 6:10). Remember, Stand Up For What is Right, Even If You Must Stand Alone! By commanding respect, you will get respect, and you can also look at yourself in the mirror and be proud. Most importantly, your children and/or relatives will learn from you and hopefully will not become entangled in Shackles. Wake up American and SHAKE THE SHACKLES.

Hortense Enid Agee is a registered nurse, practicing occupational health at a local chemical plant. She and her husband Keith and their two children reside in Long Beach, Mississippi.

CALENDAR

FEBRUARY 14
Children's Day
George Ohr Center
Storytelling: Gwendolyn Demarks
Art demonstration:
Joseph A. Pearson
Biloxi, MS
10:00 a.m. - Noon

FEBRUARY 28
Workers Helping Youth (WHY)
Extravaganza and Talent Show
Little Rock Baptist Church
Gulfport, MS
11:00 a.m.

FEBRUARY 28
Hancock County Branch NAACP
Omega Psi Phi
Oratorical Contest
St. Rose de Lima Parish Center
Bay St. Louis, MS
1:00 p.m.

FEBRUARY 28
Biloxi Branch NAACP
Freedom Awards Banquet
NCO Club - Keesler AFB
Biloxi, MS
Speaker: Nelson B. Rivers III
6:00 p.m.

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